

# Brucellosis

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## **What is brucellosis?**

Brucellosis is a bacterial disease primarily passed among animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, and deer. Other types of animals can also be infected. Humans become infected by coming in contact with animals or animal products that are contaminated with these bacteria.

## **What are the symptoms of brucellosis?**

In humans, symptoms of brucellosis include intermittent or irregular fever, headache, weakness, profuse sweating, chills, weight loss, physical weakness, and general aching. Infection of organs including the liver, the central nervous system, the lining of the heart, and the spleen may also occur. The disease in humans persists for several weeks or months and may get progressively worse. Brucellosis can also cause long-lasting or chronic symptoms that include recurring fevers, joint pain, and fatigue.

## **How is brucellosis spread?**

Humans are generally infected in one of three ways: eating or drinking something that is contaminated with the bacteria, breathing in the organism, or having the bacteria enter the body through skin wounds. The most common way to be infected is through unpasteurized milk and dairy products from diseased cows, sheep, and goats. It can also be transmitted to humans from animals through infected tissue and animal waste products.

Person-to-person infection is rare, though it can be transmitted from mothers breast-feeding their babies or through sexual activity.

## **How common is brucellosis?**

Brucellosis is rare in humans in the United States. There are usually between 100 and 200 cases each year in the United States. Most cases are among recent immigrants, people who have ingested food products imported from abroad, or in people who have traveled to countries where brucellosis is common. Occasionally there are cases reported in veterinarians, butchers, meat inspectors, and farmers. Hunters may be infected through skin wounds or by accidentally ingesting bacteria after cleaning deer, elk, moose, or wild pigs that they have killed.

## **What is the treatment for brucellosis?**

Brucellosis infection is treated with a combination of antibiotics that lasts for six weeks to prevent reoccurring infection. Depending on the severity of illness, recovery may take a few weeks to several months.

## **Are there complications from brucellosis?**

The risk of death from brucellosis is low, less than 2%, and is usually associated with

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### **Calhoun County Public Health Department**

190 E. Michigan Avenue, Suite A100  
Battle Creek, Michigan 49014  
Tel: (269) 969-6383  
Fax: (269) 969-6488

endocarditis, an infection of the heart valves and parts of the inside lining of the heart muscle.

### **How can brucellosis be prevented?**

Brucellosis can be prevented by not consuming unpasteurized milk, cheese, or ice cream while traveling. Hunters should use rubber gloves when handling organs in the cavity of the animal.

There is no vaccine available for humans.

### **How do I get more information on brucellosis?**

Calhoun County Public Health Department  
Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/brucellosis/>

Phone: 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)

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Updated 5/21/12

This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

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